1 INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

This course will be on Plato's political philosophy and it will be conducted in the form of an explanation and an interpretation of the *Symposium*. By way of introduction I have to answer these two questions: (1) Why do we study Plato's political philosophy? and (2) Why did I select the *Symposium*? As for the first question, one could say that to give courses on Plato's political philosophy is the decent thing to do. It is admitted in the profession that political science students are supposed to have some knowledge of the history of political thought, the history of political philosophy. If this is so one surely must study it thoroughly, at least in graduate school, and the thorough treatment of the history of political philosophy requires specialized courses in the great political philosophers, hence also on Plato. This reasoning is rather poor for two reasons. In the first place, it would lead to the consequence that one should give such courses also, say, on Locke or Machiavelli, and I for one give such a course only on Plato. In the second place, though in all practical matters it is indispensable, either always or mostly, to follow custom, to do what is generally done, in theoretical matters it is simply untrue. In practical matters there is a right of the first occupant: what is established must be respected. In theoretical matters this cannot be. Differently stated: The rule of practice is "let sleeping dogs lie," do not disturb the established. In theoretical matters the rule is "do not let sleeping dogs lie." Therefore, we cannot defer to precedent and must raise the question, Why do we study Plato in particular?

When we look at the present situation in the world, this side of the Iron Curtain, we see that there are two powers determining present-day thought. I call them positivism and historicism. The defect of these powers today compels us to look out for an alternative. That alternative seems to be supplied by Plato rather than anyone else.

First positivism. Positivism makes the assertion that the only form of genuine knowledge is scientific knowledge. Physics is the model of all sciences and therefore of political science in particular. But this is more a promise than an achievement. This scientific political science does not exist.

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In spite of this fact, we must take this position very seriously. Its motive can be crudely stated as follows: The same science—scientific method—which produced the H-bomb must also be able to prevent the use of the H-bomb. The science which produced the H-bomb, physics; the science dealing with the use of the H-bomb, political science. Now, you see immediately that this reasoning, that the same method which produced the H-bomb must also be able to prevent the use of the H-bomb, is very poor: the distinction between the use and misuse of anything—H-bomb included—means a distinction between good and bad, and this kind of distinction is now called a value judgment. According to the positivistic view value judgments are outside the scope of science. Therefore this positivistic political science promises something which it is, strictly speaking, unable and unwilling to supply. The characteristic thesis of positivism can be said to be that all values are equal. Positivistic science claims to be able to distinguish between attainable and unattainable ends. This is all. It cannot and does not claim more. It cannot even say that the quest for unattainable ends is foolish and therefore bad. This would be a value judgment. It can say only that they are unattainable. But it cannot say that the quest for unattainable ends is inferior to the quest for attainable ends. Positivists sometimes reject the imputation that according to their views all values are equal. But I can only say that this is merely an attempt to befog the issue. What they say in fact is that as far as human knowledge or reason is concerned, or as far as we know, all values are equal. This they certainly say, and there is no practical difference between the assertion 'as far as we know and shall ever be able to know' and the assertion that all values are equal.

The positivistic position can be characterized as follows: There is no position between the objectivity of science and the subjectivity of evaluations. The principles of thought, of thinking, of understanding, are objective. The principles of preference or action are necessarily subjective. I leave it at these brief remarks in order to characterize in a few words an alternative to positivism which I call historicism. There are all kinds of overlapping between these two areas of thinking, but it is unnecessary for us to go into them.

In the clear case, historicism admits that a value-free social science is impossible. But it asserts that both principles of thought and principles of action are essentially variable, or historical, and therefore in a radical sense subjective. In the vulgar form of this position we cannot arrive at any higher principles of understanding and of preferring than those of Western civilization. There are no principles of understanding and principles of prefer-

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ring which belong to man as man, who can never go beyond a historically qualified humanity such as Western civilization. Historicism stems from Germany and is, therefore, far more developed there than, for example, in this country. But even in this country you find it in various forms. Carl Becker, I believe, was the most famous representative of historicism who denied the impossibility of any objective history. All historiography is based on the climate of the country and the age and can never transcend it. The difficulty with historicism, simply stated, is this: it cannot help transcending history by its very assertion. If we say every sort of man is radically historical, this assertion is no longer meant to be historical and therefore refutes the position. I cannot go into any further detail. I can only assert here that both positivism and historicism are not viable. But this is not the subject of this course. Assuming that they are viable, they are admittedly late positions. They are based on the experience of the failure of an earlier approach. This earlier approach is called in the loose language of this kind of literature the absolutist approach.

The absolutist approach asserts that there are invariable, unchangeable, universally valid principles of thought and action. This, it is said, has been destroyed by man's deeper reflection or by man's longer experience. From this it follows that if we as positivists or historicists want to understand ourselves we must understand our own ground, i.e., the absolutism of the past and the experience of the failure of that absolutism. Therefore a historicist or relativist, if he reflects on his position and wants to understand what he says, is compelled to understand the older position, the absolutist position, which he replaces. In other words, reflection, of which I have given here barely a specimen, on the defects of the views prevalent today, leads us to take a serious interest in the opposite view, in an evaluating social science that refers to invariable and universal principles. Such a social science was in existence at least until the end of the eighteenth century. The notion of a value-free social science emerged only in the last decade of the nineteenth century. The most talked about form of this older form of social science is the natural law teaching. This natural law teaching has its roots in the teaching of Plato and Aristotle, but it was not developed by them. It began to be developed by a certain Greek school, the so-called Stoics, which emerged after Aristotle, but we have barely sufficient evidence to speak about the Stoic natural law school. For all practical purposes, the classic of the natural law social science is Thomas Aquinas. As that part of the movement of thought which I have discussed up until now, Thomas Aquinas would be of the utmost interest to us.

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But why concentrate on Plato as distinguished from Thomas Aquinas? In order to understand that, we have to consider a second meaning of relativism which has nothing to do with a value-free social science. If we look at what is going on in the sciences proper, in the natural sciences, and what is their peculiar character compared with earlier natural science, say up to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, we notice this: These sciences live in an open horizon. No results are regarded as definitive. All results, all theories, are regarded as open to future revision in the light of new evidence. This is a new phenomenon, that the highest authority for human society—and the highest authority for Western society is science—has this peculiarly open character. As someone who was very competent to speak about these matters, Nietzsche, put it, "We are the first men who do not possess the truth, but only seek it." Nietzsche had in mind all dogmas, all systems which predominated in the past and also sometime later. The novel thing was a society which apparently does not possess the truth. Now, there is an apparent modesty, an apparent commonsensical reasonableness in this open-mindedness, this refusal to say, "I possess the truth," which has surely some attraction for most of us. When we look back from this seeming peculiarity of the late nineteenth century and twentieth century to the past, we see that there is only one great philosopher who somehow seems to have stood for this principle, that the questions are clearer than the answers to the important questions. That was Plato.

Everyone knows, or has heard, that according to Plato man is incapable of acquiring full wisdom; that the very name of philosophy—a quest for wisdom, love of wisdom—indicates that wisdom proper is not accessible to men. Or to use the other formula, philosophy is knowledge of ignorance rather than the complete system. One can also indicate this historically as follows: Plato founded a school called the Academy. This school became, a few generations after Plato, the New Academy, a skeptical school. Whereas traditional Platonism was one of the most dogmatic schools, Plato gave rise to a most skeptical school as well, and this can be explained by the fact that while Plato himself was neither a dogmatist nor a skeptic, his successors were unable to remain on this level. There is a remarkable sentence of Pascal according to which we know too little to be dogmatists and too much to be skeptics, which expresses beautifully what Plato conveys through his dialogues. This peculiar openness of Plato seems to make him particularly attractive to our age, which has gone through so many moral and other disappointments. I will not now develop this notion of Plato as a thinker who cannot be properly characterized as either dogmatic or skeptic. I will

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leave it at the following remark. The very openness of Plato—the assertion that man does not possess wisdom, that he can only strive for wisdom—in a way also closes the issue. Human knowledge is imperfect. Human knowledge is at best progressive and never final. This is, of course, a final assertion. The great difference between Plato and his modern followers, or seeming followers, is that Plato knew that men cannot live and think without a finality of some sort. Plato contended that the finality of the insight that we are never fully knowing implies a final answer to the question of the good life, including the question of the best society. This is the problem we have to understand while trying to understand Plato's thought.

In what I said there is an implication which I would like to make explicit: Plato never wrote a system of philosophy. In a way, no one until the seventeenth century had a system, strictly speaking, but Plato did not even write treatises, as Aristotle did, for example. Plato wrote only dialogues. The dialogic character of the Platonic writings has something to do with this peculiar openness of Plato's inquiries. This, however, creates a difficulty which is very great. In his dialogues Plato never appears as a character. Plato never says a word. Socrates speaks, and other men speak, but with what right can we say that what Socrates says is Plato's view? If you say it is obvious, I can reply very simply that it is also obvious in the dialogues that Socrates is an ironical man. To have as one's spokesman a man most famous for his irony is almost the same as not having a spokesman at all. To say it differently: No one would dream of ascribing to Shakespeare every sentence expressed by any Shakespearean character, however attractive that character may be. It is wise to begin the study of Plato with this sober skepticism. Whether a certain sentiment or thought expressed by any character, however attractive, is Plato's view, we do not know. Plato expresses his views surely through his dialogues, but not simply through the explicit utterances of his speakers. From this follows a variety of rules of reading which we will take up on the proper occasions. But, to begin with, the rule can be stated in its universality as follows: Plato's dialogues demand to be read with exceeding care. There is nothing superfluous, nothing meaningless in a Platonic dialogue. Socrates in the *Phaedrus* compares the good writing, the perfect writing, to a living being in which each part, however small, has a necessary function for the life and activity of that living being. The Platonic dialogue has a function—the function is to make us understand. And the dialogue is comparable to an organism insofar as every part of it has a function in making us understand. Therefore we must consider everything in a dialogue. I leave it at these general remarks about why we turn to Plato and turn now to the

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question, Why do we choose the *Symposium?* What can we expect to learn from the *Symposium* that we are not likely to learn from any other dialogue?

I give two reasons provisionally: There are many competitors with philosophy or many alternatives to philosophy. But the most important of them, according to Plato, is poetry, not science. From Plato's point of view what we call science is simply and obviously subordinate to philosophy and therefore not a competitor. Nor can one say religion, because religion is not a Greek term. One would have to say piety. But piety is from Plato's point of view no competitor with philosophy because philosophy, rightly understood, is the true piety. The competitor is poetry, especially tragedy, which has the broadest and deepest appeal because it moves most men most deeply.

At the beginning of the tenth book of the *Republic,* Plato speaks of the feud between philosophy and poetry. In the *Apology of Socrates* the poet Meletus appears to be the chief accuser of Socrates. He acts against Socrates on behalf of the poets. The class interests of the poets have been endangered by Socrates. The foundation of the formal accusation against Socrates was led by an informal accusation that Aristophanes, the comic poet, did not indeed originate but expressed, in his *Clouds.*

Now what is the issue between philosophy and poetry? It is a contest for supremacy regarding wisdom. Let me illustrate this from Aristophanes' *Clouds:* Socrates is presented there as a student of nature, a student of the nature of all things, or of the whole, and also as a teacher of rhetoric. He is presented as corrupting the young by letting them see the victory of the argument for injustice over the argument in favor of justice. He transcends the ephemeral, ordinary life of man, the merely human, and realizes the conventional character of those things which are regarded as sacred by all men. Although he is a teacher of rhetoric, he is unable to win the argument in the end—he cannot persuade the many. His "think tank," his school, is burned down. Philosophy, Aristophanes suggests, in contradistinction to poetry, is unable to persuade or to charm the multitude. Philosophy transcends the ephemeral, the mundane, the political. However, it cannot find its way back to it. The philosopher as such is blind to the context within which philosophy exists, namely political life. He does not reflect on his own doing, he lacks self-knowledge—he lacks prudence in the wide Platonic sense of the word, because he does not understand political things. This is connected with the fact—again I follow Aristophanes' indication—that philosophy is unerotic and a-music, unpoetic. Philosophy is blind to the human things as experienced in life, in the acts of living. These acts of living are precisely the theme of poetry. Poetry integrates purely theoreti-

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cal wisdom into a human context. It completes the completely theoretical wisdom by self-knowledge. Poetry is the capstone of wisdom. Poetry alone makes for the most comprehensive knowledge. By the way, you are all aware of this problem in present-day life. There is hardly anyone among you, I believe, who has not seen that a contemporary novelist with a reasonable degree of competence tells us much more about modern society than volumes of social science analysis. I don't question that social science analyses are very important, but still, if you want to get a broad view and a deep view you read a novel rather than social science.

Plato and Xenophon defend Socrates against this charge as follows: Socrates is so far from being blind to the political that he is truly the discoverer of the political in its own kind. Precisely Socrates understood the political as such, namely, the fact that the political is characterized by a certain recalcitrance to philosophy. In Plato's *Republic* we see that Socrates is a politically responsible man. It is Socrates' work that the argument in favor of justice wins out over the argument in favor of injustice. Socrates' philosophy is one act of obedience to the Delphic injunction "know thyself." His whole philosophy is self-knowledge or prudence. And Socrates, far from being an unerotic man, is the erotician. It is not true that poetry is the capstone of philosophy. On the contrary, philosophy is the capstone of poetry. This means not merely, as we shall see in the *Symposium,* that philosophy defeats poetry in the contest for supremacy regarding wisdom, it means also that the right kind of philosophy is more truly poetic than poetry in the common sense of the term. Poetry presents or interprets man's experience of human things according to their proper order, namely, the high is high and the low is low. But poetry must admit that the human things are not simply the highest things or the first things, that the true principles are no longer human. For example, in Homer the principle, the *arkhē,* is the Ocean—Okeanos. Yet Homer does not let us see, and cannot let us see, the principle becoming manifest in man above everything else, and become differently manifest in different men. When you see Hector or Achilles, you do not see Okeanos, the principle, in them. There is a crude juxtaposition, Plato implies, between the ultimate knowledge of the principle and poetry itself. Whereas Plato claims that by his understanding of the principle he is enabled to make the true principles transparent in human beings, in human action, in his characters. The reason he can raise that claim is his particular opinion, which we shall study later, of the human soul. For Plato, the human soul, and in a sense man, is, as it were, the concrescence, the growing together, of the highest principles. Therefore, if you have understood the

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soul in its essence, you can make these highest principles transparent in all human beings and all types of human beings. And this is precisely what Plato is trying to do in his dialogues. Platonic philosophy, by virtue of a deeper understanding of the principles, is able to see in men the manifestations of the principles.

The most extensive discussion of poetry in Plato occurs in the *Republic* and the *Laws*. But in those two dialogues we have no discussion with poets—no poets are present. The meeting of Socrates with poets, the contest of Socrates with poetry, is the *Symposium*. This is the first reason why the *Symposium* is of special importance. Lest you think that this is a question that involves a very special premise, namely, some sympathy for Plato, I assure you that the question is nothing less than the status of human reason. They all believe in human reason, but the poets imply somehow that something other than reason is superior to reason and must take its place.

The second reason why the *Symposium* is important is this: the theme common to poetry and philosophy is the human things. The human things, however, are primarily the political things, for mankind's greatest objectives, most impressive objectives, are political—freedom and empire. One might also say peace and war are clearly political phenomena. Don't forget that the title of what is somehow the greatest modern novel is *War and Peace*. Even today, Khrushchev and Eisenhower feed the headlines to a much higher degree than the White Sox or Ingrid Bergman's most recent matrimonial adventure. And the relation of Sputnik to the cold war is obvious to the meanest capacities. But what is the core of the political? Men killing men on the largest scale in broad daylight and with the greatest serenity. Today the most prominent fact is the cold war, communism versus liberal democracy, i.e., an antagonism of political orders, of regimes. Not Russia and the United States, not Russian culture and language versus English culture and language, they are only accidental.

The political in the political is the phenomenon which the Greeks called *politeia* (the title of Plato's *Republic* in the original). This word means, loosely explained, something like constitution. The politeia designates the character of the government, the powers of the government. Secondly, however, and this is the more important meaning, politeia designates a way of life. The way of life of a society is decisively determined by its hierarchy—its stratification, as it is now called. The most massive form of this stratification is expressed by this question: Which type of men predominate in broad daylight and with a view to compel power and obedience and respect? Which habits are fostered and admired by the society as a whole as it ex-

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presses itself in its actions as a society? Which moral taste is operating through the political order? We see immediately, on the basis of our present-day experiences, that there is a variety of such regimes. The conflict among them is only a conflict in the minds of men. Thus the question arises of what is the best regime. The first answer given by such men as Plato and Aristotle, and Socrates before them, is that in which the wise rule, absolutely and irresponsibly. Irresponsibly in the sense that they are not responsible to other human beings. That the wise should be responsible to the unwise seems to be against nature. But this regime is not possible, as both Plato and Aristotle knew. The few wise are too weak in body to force the many unwise, and they cannot persuade the many unwise sufficiently. Wisdom must be qualified by consent, it must be diluted by consent, i.e., by consent of the unwise. The political implies, in other words, something like a right of un-wisdom, a right of folly. This is the paradox of the political, that such a right of un-wisdom is admitted. The polis—the people—demand the highest respect without deserving the highest respect. This is the dilemma of the political. Not the pronouncements of wisdom, but laws rule. The rule of wisdom is possible only in this form: a wise legislator might devise a code which is then adopted through persuasion of the citizen body. It is clearly not enough that laws be adopted; there must also be those who are capable of applying and administering them equitably. The Greek word for equitable is the same as the word for gentleman. The right kind of rule is the rule of gentlemen. This does not mean exactly the same as it means in England; it means rather the urban patricians whose wealth is rural, not commercial. This is the famous economic condition of Greek thought, the famous prejudice, as some others say. I am now concerned with the crucial philosophic point, which is not affected fully by these things. The implication of the Platonic-Aristotelian philosophy is, then, that there cannot be a rational society, meaning a society consisting of fully rational human beings. The polis as polis is characterized by an essential, irremediable recalcitrance to reason. One could give many examples of that, which I will do on the proper occasion. There is something harsh in the political, something angry. Plato somewhere compares the laws with an angry and obstinate old man who always says the same thing without considering open-mindedly the circumstances (*Statesman* 294b8–c4). It is for this reason that Plato calls the political passion 'spiritedness' *(thumos),* which also means something like anger. This harshness and severity is essential for constituting the polis and is, in a way, most characteristic of the polis.

In the *Republic* Plato teaches that this faculty which he calls spiritedness

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is higher than desire. You may recall that in the *Republic* we have three parts of the soul: let us call the first reason and then, the two nonrational ones, spiritedness and desire. Desire is also called 'eros', a key word for our present course. I would like to illustrate this by two more points. According to the teaching of the *Republic,* the tyrant, the most abominable ruler, justice and injustice incarnate, is eros incarnate. Another illustration: When Plato speaks in the second book of the *Republic* of the motives of men for establishing societies, he is completely silent about procreation. He speaks of hunger and thirst and need for shelter. The whole argument of the *Republic* is based on a deliberate, and deliberately exaggerated, demotion of eros, inasmuch as there is a tension between the political passion—spiritedness—and the erotic passion. The tension between spiritedness and eros corresponds somehow to the tension between the political and the nonpolitical. Now, whereas Plato's *Republic* can be said to be the political dialogue, we will tentatively say that the *Symposium* is the most emphatically nonpolitical dialogue of Plato, insofar as he deals with that element in man which is in essential tension with the political element.

Let me explain: As political scientists we are interested in political phenomena. But we must also be interested, simultaneously, in the political as political. What is it that gives elections, for example, their peculiarly political character? This more abstract question, What is the political, as distinguished from the study of particular political phenomena?, is for Plato a most important question. One cannot understand the political as such, without understanding somehow the nonpolitical. When you speak of the political, you imply that there is something outside the political and you must have some awareness of it. The nonpolitical may be entirely irrelevant for the political, e.g., digestion, or the backside of the moon, or it may be politically relevant. In the latter case, the nonpolitical is either subpolitical, say the economical, or suprapolitical—religion. The nonpolitical, as politically relevant, is the foundation of the political, either as condition or as the ultimate end. In both meanings, the nonpolitical was called traditionally the natural. There may be something natural which transcends the political in dignity and which gives politics its guidance. That is what was meant by those thinkers who spoke of the natural law and natural right. The word *natural* indicated the foundations of the political that are of themselves not simply political. The foundation of the political is, somehow, nature, and nature may be understood in different ways. One more thing: it is somehow the contention of Plato that the nature of man and, in a way, the nature of the whole, is eros.

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To summarize: The *Symposium* is the dialogue of the conflict between philosophy and poetry where the poets are in a position to defend themselves. They cannot in the *Republic* and the *Laws*. Secondly, its subject is the foundation of the political—the natural. Somehow this is strongly identified with eros, poetry and eros. Somehow we feel that there is a certain connection between these two themes. Poets seem to be particularly expressive of eros, and eros seems to require poetic treatment. So much for the general introduction.

I begin in the beginning. In the beginning of any book is a title. The Platonic titles have this form: there is a general title, and then we have "or on wine." Then comes the description of the [category] to which the dialogue belongs: it might be called ethical, dialectical, or natural; it might also be called tentative or what have you. The general view today is that all this is surely not Platonic. I am inclined to believe that the latter part, "ethical" in the case of our dialogue, is really a scholastic addition that somehow does not fit the Platonic style. But the alternative title might possibly go back to Plato. I will say a few words about the alternative title of our dialogue. Our dialogue is called, in the subtitle, "on the good." Now this is seemingly strange because the theme of the *Symposium* is eros, not the good. Nevertheless, there is a good reason for taking the title "on the good" seriously: in the development of the theme of eros the good will appear to be the highest theme. In the *Republic* we have seen that the highest learning is called the good. But what was only alluded to in the *Republic* is developed at somewhat greater length in the *Symposium*. Therefore, the subtitle is of some meaning.

But let us turn to the title, and here again I must begin from the most external. As matters stand today, some of the dialogues which have come down to us as Platonic dialogues are regarded as spurious. I believe it is wise to suspend our judgment on this subject and simply to accept all dialogues which have come down to us as Platonic. The body of Platonic writings consists of nine groups of four (nine tetralogies). Thirty-five of these are dialogues and one consists of thirteen letters. Of the thirty-five dialogues, twenty-five have as their titles the names of participants in the conversation. Seven have as their titles a theme—that's the rare case: *Republic, Laws, Sophist, Statesman, Apology of Socrates, Minos, Hipparchus*. Six of these seven themes, as appears either immediately or else if you look at them, are political. In other words, when you look at a book called *Gorgias* you can't know what is in it, but when we hear *Statesman,* you have some notion of what will be in it. Therefore, the more revealing titles are those which indicate a

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theme. As I said, six are political: *Republic; Laws; Sophist; Minos,* who was a legislator; *Hipparchus,* an Athenian tyrant; and the *Apology of Socrates,* which, as a forensic speech, is obviously also about political action. There are three remaining dialogues: the *Rivals (Erastae* or *Anterastae),* where the title indicates the participants. Here they have no names; the only way to indicate them was their common quality, rivals in love. *Epinomis* has its name from its position in the work, as a sequel to *Nomos,* i.e., to the *Laws.* The only remaining title is that of our work: the *Symposium.* This is a unique case. The *Symposium* is the only dialogue whose title indicates the occasion. Why not the name of a participant? The answer: there is not just one participant; there are six persons other than Socrates and, God knows, each may be as important as everyone else. It is also possible to make this tentative suggestion. The *Symposium* as you know or will find out soon, consists of six speeches on eros, and the last one is by Socrates. One is inclined to assume that there is an ascent from the least interesting or least wise speech to Socrates' speech, which is the wisest. The speaker before Socrates is Agathon. Agathon is the most important individual after Socrates. But we don't know that. In Greek this name sounds almost like *agathon,* "the good." If the subtitle were really "on the good" this would not be a bad pun.

The *Symposium,* at any rate, is the only dialogue whose title designates an occasion. Why did Plato single out this occasion, a symposium? Plato's contemporary rival, ultimately friend, Xenophon, also wrote a *Symposium.* In the beginning this book says that it will treat the deeds of gentlemen performed in play, performed jocularly. In a way this is also true of Plato's *Symposium:* playful deeds of gentlemen. Symposia give rise to play and jokes, but at the same time they are susceptible of noble speeches. There are other human gatherings which are not so likely to give rise to delicate and noble speeches. You would have to reflect about the medium of symposia, which is wine, and the effects of wine. I mention only two of them, which have been articulated by Plato, so we are not substituting our own poor experiences for what Plato had in mind. But you will, I believe, recognize a phenomenon known to you from the daily papers. In the first place, wine gives rise to the ability or willingness to say everything—openness, frankness. Connected with this is what the Greeks called hubris, wantonness, doing things you would never do when sober, presumptuousness to take risks. In other words, this occasion is really a particularly important one. We are likely to hear interesting things which are not said on every occasion if we can listen to a symposium.

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Another important distinction, apart from the character of the title of the dialogue, is this: a dialogue is either performed or narrated. A performed dialogue looks like a drama; we get a list of the characters in the beginning. In the narrated dialogue someone tells that he was present when people had this conversation—which is, of course, cumbersome, because he has to say all the time, "And then he said . . . ," but it has also certain great virtues because the narrator can say certain things. For example, if A and B were in a dialogue and at a certain point B made a particularly stupid expression, then interlocutor A cannot in propriety say, "Why do you look so stupid?" But the narrator can very well say, "Then he said, with a very stupid expression . . ." This has very broad implications.

Of the thirty-five Platonic dialogues, twenty-five are performed. We can say that is the normal case. There is one intermediate case in which we almost see a narrated dialogue transformed into a performed one, and that is the *Theaetetus.* Nine are simply narrated. Our dialogue belongs to the narrated dialogues. A narrated dialogue is either narrated by Socrates or by someone else. Six are narrated by Socrates. If Socrates is the narrator we find in the beginning of the dialogue either the name of Socrates without any addition or the name of Socrates and the man to whom he narrates: simply Socrates in the case of the *Republic, Charmides, Lysis,* and *Rivals,* Socrates to Crito in the *Euthydemus* or to a comrade in the *Protagoras.* Narrated by someone other than Socrates are three dialogues: *Parmenides, Phaedo,* and the *Symposium,* which is narrated by a man called Apollodorus to a comrade. I call him a comrade because in Greek he is not called a friend and he is also a bit closer than a mere acquaintance. The political implication that the word *comrade* has acquired in our age was present in the Greek, although from a different point of view. The oligarchic clubs were called comraderies. I only mention this point, which will later on take on some importance.

The *Symposium* and the *Protagoras* are both explicitly told to comrades.

[Tape change.] . . . a man of a very common sort, and this is a man called Aristodemus. He is a very important character, perhaps the most important character in the book, but he does not say a word. That happens sometimes in Platonic dialogues, that someone is silently there, and one misunderstands the whole situation if one does not look at that silent individual and what he shows by being present. Aristodemus, then, had told the story to both Phoenix and Apollodorus. Let me put it this way, crudely, but not unreasonably, I believe. Aristodemus was present at the symposium many years ago. He is older than the two men to whom he told it. He was

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associated with Socrates many years ago. Aristodemus is the leak to the younger friends of Socrates, and Apollodorus is the leak to the general public. We have to raise this question: Why was the story dormant for so long? And why is there only a one-way street to the truth? Namely, only through Apollodorus and Aristodemus. This must be connected to the character of Apollodorus and Aristodemus. Apollodorus is an enthusiast; he cannot help talking of Socrates, that marvelous man, all the time. But what is the place of Aristodemus? That is more difficult to say. Aristodemus knew it for many, many years, and only now does he talk about it. Was it not proper to tell the story earlier? Was Aristodemus the man most likely to do something perhaps slightly improper? I believe we can answer that question, but I postpone it because no answer is given here. We know the year the *Symposium* took place. It was the year Agathon won first prize. This is somehow known by tradition, and we arrive at the year 416. When was it told? I would like to give a tentative answer to this question, and develop it in greater detail later on.

Before I can give a tentative answer to this I must introduce another item. In the year 415 the Athenians began their expedition against Sicily, for which Alcibiades was chiefly responsible. This was a terrific gamble, but Alcibiades was such a genius that it might very well have been successful. The Athenians committed the folly, politically speaking, of calling back Alcibiades almost immediately after the expedition had sailed. Alcibiades didn't like it and fled to Sparta. He ruined Athens. He contributed more to the ruin of Athens than any other man. When the expedition was about to sail, the Athenians awoke one morning to find that most of the herms—pillars surmounted by a bust, usually of Hermes—had been defaced the night before. This was a great act of blasphemy, but it also had a certain political connotation. Somehow this Hermes statue was connected with the democracy, and the people had the feeling that some subversive activity had taken place. Then resident aliens (metics) revealed that other defacements of statues had happened earlier, but the big scandal was the profanation of the Eleusinian mysteries, the most sacred mysteries in Athens. The rumor was that the terrible fellow behind it all was Alcibiades. This was the background of the recall of Alcibiades and of Alcibiades' flight. He knew that condemnation of death was the only possibility those days for, as people now say, public hysteria.

Of the seven or eight characters in the *Symposium,* two others beside Alcibiades were implicated in this very dangerous undertaking: Phaedrus and Eryximachus. This has to be taken into consideration. A profanation of

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mystery occurs only when someone reveals it to another who is not already initiated. Later on in the *Symposium* we do find an explicit presentation of mystery, given by Socrates. I suggest tentatively that the dramatic play underlying the *Symposium* is that here you get the true report of what happened in 415 or 416. Not the vulgar, hysterical kind. This, after all, was very dignified, but we see how things become distorted.

Apollodorus is surprised that Glaucon thinks that the symposium took place only a short while ago. Glaucon knows only that there was in the house of Agathon a party at which Socrates and Alcibiades were present. Apollodorus says, this is absurd. Agathon left Athens many years ago—how could the party have taken place a short while ago? But why did he refer to Agathon? Socrates was always in Athens, his situation did not change. What about the other man, Alcibiades? If the thing had taken place in 415 it would be perfectly sufficient to say, "How can you say that that party took place now, since everyone knows Alcibiades left in 415 never to return?" Why refer to the obscure fact that Agathon won the prize? Answer: Because Alcibiades was in Athens. Alcibiades had returned to Athens in 407. He was such a genius that he compelled the city which he had betrayed to permit him to return, and to acquit him. That is also the reason why the story is told now. The open hysteria and terrible indignation have now been overcome. The most endangered Alcibiades is now restored. He is the leader of the procession to the shrine in Eleusis of Demeter and Kore, the object of this profanation of the mysteries.

Of course you can raise this question: Why does a serious man like Plato make such jokes? That will only gradually appear when we enter into the subject, but it is important to keep this in mind: the *Symposium* is a dialogue made unique by its title and by the fact that it is narrated by someone other than Socrates, secondhand, for the second time. It is a story that happened some years ago, but now we can finally hear it.

I mention another point which, I think, will be of some help. When you come to read the dialogue, you will see that the subject matter is eros. There is no question about that. But Phaedrus, a young man, proposes eros more specifically, and perhaps as a matter of course, as a god—the god Eros. Eros is not introduced as a power of the human soul, or what have you, but as the god Eros. Now, if we look around in the Platonic dialogues, we find the greatest variety of subject matter. We find many dialogues dealing with god or the gods, most specifically the *Laws,* the only dialogue which begins with the word *god*. We find something which is almost explicitly called the theology in the second book of the *Republic*. But no other di-

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alogue is as a whole devoted to a god, goddess, or gods. The *Republic,* obviously, is devoted to justice, the *Laws* to law. The only dialogue devoted to a god—god with a small *g*—is the *Symposium.* From the point of view of the common notions prevailing at the time, a god is of course an infinitely higher subject than the just, or laws, or rhetoric, or any other subject. We must put these things together: the uniqueness of the character, the uniqueness of the circumstances of the narration, the uniqueness of the theme. Then we understand also this playful link-up with the profanation of the mysteries in 416 or 415. This is the gravest, the most dangerous thing, the profanation of the mysteries of the gods. This is, I think, the traditional description of what the *Symposium* is about.

Naturally we have to raise this question: If this is so, why is Eros and no other god singled out as the theme of a Platonic dialogue? And other questions follow from this: the ambiguity of eros as a god, the way the Greeks understood a god, and also what we mean by eros, a character of the human soul. This is essential for understanding the dialogue. I will leave it at that.

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2 THE SETTING

I would like to say again a few words about the reasons which entitle one to speak of Plato's *Symposium* in a political science course. If scientific political science were the highest form of the understanding of political things then we should close Plato and return to Talcott Parsons or similar writers. But if scientific social science is not quite sufficient, then we need some supplement. This supplement is generally supplied by novels today. In other words, by utterances which are not scientific, not rational, which are subjective. This implies that there is a possible conflict between poetry, which includes novels, and philosophy. Perhaps philosophy can do the job that poetry claims to do and to some extent does.

A third consideration: the subject matter of the *Symposium* is eros. This does play a considerable role in scientific social science. Most of you will have heard the name of Harold Lasswell, who brought psychoanalysis into political science. This has had a very great success with the profession. To judge psychoanalysis and its contribution to political science one would have to have some awareness of alternative interpretations of eros. The alternative interpretation of eros is supplied in Plato's *Symposium.* One could give other reasons of a similar kind in case there is still someone among you who does not see the necessity for political scientists to study Plato's *Symposium,* and I am perfectly willing to open such a discussion.

To turn, then, to the *Symposium:* I said last time the theme is eros. The *Symposium* stands out among the Platonic titles in that its title is unique. The title indicates the occasion of the conversation. There is a connection between the unique character of the title and the unique character of the subject. The subject is not simply eros; it is the god Eros. The *Symposium* is the only Platonic dialogue explicitly devoted to a god. We have to consider also, and we began this last time, the peculiar position of the *Symposium* within the body of Platonic writings. There is no completely isolated Platonic dialogue. Every dialogue is connected with every other dialogue but sometimes in a very indirect way. One of the first steps one has to take in trying to understand a Platonic dialogue is to find out its nearest kin. I mentioned one point last time: the *Symposium* is one of the three dialogues which are not narrated by Socrates. The two others are the *Parmenides* and the *Phaedo.* They are the only Platonic dialogues dealing with the

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